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ABSTRACT

The two elements of drama are action and dialogue, and both have a place in the foreign-language learning experience. They may be introduced into the classroom by means of a "drama lab," a learning activity that permits students to act out foreign language materials such as tableaus, poetry, ballads, folklore, and plays. Drama allows the student to express his individuality, and the material, if it is culture-related, brings to life the cultural context of the foreign language. The primary benefit of the drama lab is the creation of a situation in which communication in the target language is mandatory. The two basic rules for conducting a drama lab are: (1) All the students should participate actively. (2) All performances should be given in class, rather than as an extracurricular activity. Classroom drama may be introduced early, beginning with tableaus, perhaps puppet shows or enactments of national legends in elementary school classes. Type and content of the material should vary according to language learning level, maturity, and age. Timing and planning are also important to the effectiveness of drama as a teaching technique. For the high school level, team projects involving research and script writing, as well as performance, are recommended. The bibliography lists additional sources of guidelines and materials. (Author/LG)

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DRAMATICS IN THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

by Emma J. Blanch

INTRODUCTION

The two elements of drama are action and dialogue, and both have a place in the foreign-language learning experience. These elements may be introduced into the classroom by means of a drama lab, a learning activity that permits students to act out dramatized, foreign-language materials such as tableaus, poetry, ballads, folklore, and one-act plays. One authority, Theodore Huebener, feels that "probably nothing is superior to dramatization as an activity for practicing a foreign language. (It) is psychologically sound, for it connects the action with the spoken word. The actor has to think in the foreign language; there is no intermediate stage of translation."[1]

For the past seven years I have incorporated dramatic techniques in my French classes at all levels—beginning, intermediate, and advanced—with gratifying results. The drama lab introduces action, student participation, and student interaction into the classroom. Perhaps more important, it elicits a degree of student response that is unmatched by the other techniques with which one may vary the year's teaching. The virtue of using drama is that it allows the student to express his individuality in a learning situation through identification with the medium. Furthermore, adapting culture-related material for dramatization brings to life something of the cultural context of the foreign language.

It is hoped that this paper will offer workable suggestions for the use of drama as a teaching technique. It is important to note that for our purposes, drama does not necessarily mean presenting a play on a proscenium stage. Rather, in its broader sense, drama can include many related activities, such as puppet shows, dramatic readings, and songs, all of which nevertheless are characterized by movement, speech, and active student involvement and participation.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH DRAMA

Basic to our discussion, of course, is the acknowledgement that one objective of foreign language teaching is to impart a knowledge and awareness of the people whose language is being taught. In "Describing and Teaching the Sociocultural Context of a Foreign Language and Literature," H.L. Nostrand recognizes this objective as a legitimate one: "The unique

contribution of language teachers lies, of course, in developing the concepts descriptive of the foreign culture, by enabling the learner to combine 'experience of' and 'knowledge about' into an understanding of one way of life alien to his own. Enlightened language teaching today shows gratifying progress in all its component parts except one: the teaching of the foreign cultural context. We can teach the spoken language with increasing efficiency. . . the weakest aspect of our whole performance is the teaching of the foreign culture and society."[2]

The drama lab is a productive approach to the tandem teaching of both language and cultural content. Its unique value lies in the fact that the two reinforce each other in the learning experience, partly by making students more receptive to foreign expressions in an immediate context, and partly by engaging their interest in the dramatized materials. At its best, this technique involves the student emotionally and brings about an identification on his part with the dynamics of the language. Ideally, this kind of involvement should be an integral part of language teaching. After having first comprehended the emotional values of the language, students are better motivated to study grammar and fundamentals. They will then more readily accept foreign sounds and idioms, and will try to express themselves with greater accuracy.

GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM DRAMA

Before proceeding further, two ground rules for the drama lab should be mentioned. Rule One: All students in a class should participate actively, not just those who are more fluent or extroverted. Rule Two: Since dramatics in the target language is a pedagogical technique, all drama and adaptations should be presented in the classroom and not merely reserved for assemblies, club meetings, the P.T.A., or other extracurricular activities.

Classroom drama may be introduced early in language teaching, beginning with tableaus of material that will vary with level, maturity, and age. In the elementary schools, relatively more presentations and less "teaching" will take place. Teachers in these grades will probably present mostly popular folksongs and short fables. To help the teacher get started with dramatization at this level, Huebener's "Audio-Visual Techniques" is useful, since it includes a fairy tale and conversations which can be acted out.[3]

Projects in junior high school should be introduced in English, but in the high school they should be presented only in the foreign language. In the latter, dramas should be presented at regular intervals, usually following each teaching unit.

Timing is extremely important. For best results, dramatics should never be the main objective of the lesson and should never exceed fifteen minutes in a regular course. One or two of these drama labs a month can be recommended; more would be detrimental to other phases of language teaching that must also be carried out during the year. Mastery of basic language skills will occupy a large portion of classroom time, but dramatic techniques can be introduced in the early stages of instruction.

In every case, the material should be correlated with the lessons and planned well in advance. A careful selection should be made to ensure that both content and expression are appropriate for the level being taught. Following this article is a list of both old and new books which may be helpful. Unfortunately, few of the strikingly beautiful texts on the market present adequate, up-to-date material in a usable form. Although some modern texts contain dramatizations, it is often up to the teacher to adapt older material for use in the drama lab. Simple dialogues can be arranged from the reading passages found in any textbook, even by the students themselves under the guidance of the teacher, and presented to the class.

TABLEAUS

Tableau presentations are narrated pantomimes or scenes. They are especially appropriate for beginning levels as an introduction to the use of dramatics in the classroom.

In level I French, a guignol (puppet show) can be presented as a series of tableaus. Certain of Molière's plays can be simplified and adapted for this activity because of their farcical nature and comical, stereotyped characterizations. The puppets may be resourcefully improvised by painting faces on small brown paper bags with holes cut for thumb and finger. In addition, the creative activity of designing the puppets will motivate the students in the project. For level I Spanish classes, a marketplace or a simulated bullfight is appropriate, with a student narrating the scene. For level I German, a street fair with a brass band and sausage vendor is typical.

Another approach can be the enactment of a French, Spanish, or German legendary episode, such as the encounter of young Siegfried and the smith and Siegfried's combat with the dragon.[4] The episodic nature of the story is suitable for a progressive narration. One student may narrate the encounter of Siegfried and the smith, while another describes the slaying of the dragon, and a third Siegfried's discovery of the magical properties imparted to him by bathing in the dragon's blood. Other students may act out the parts, while the nonparticipating students may be expected to retell the events or answer questions about the presentation, e.g.: "Womit

hat Siegfried den Drachen erschlagen?" (What did Siegfried use to slay the dragon?) The teacher might point out the significance of this legendary figure in German culture as the prototype of heroic courage. In level II French, the epic poem "La Chanson de Roland," mentioned in so many texts, may be performed as a progressive narration after the unit on medieval times.[5] For intermediate level Spanish, the well-known adventures of Don Quijote de la Mancha are available in three different presentations for the classroom.[6] Obsolete words and phrases should be changed according to present-day usage. The language taught should be lively and understandable. Teachers must present all material, old and new, in such a way as to enhance the students' practical vocabulary while bringing out significant cultural highlights.

Something of a country's past can be evoked through the use of folkloric costumes and accessories, although these need not elaborate. The emphasis should be kept on the students' active participation and accurate narration of the tableau, which may take the form of a team project, discussed in a later section in this report.

PLAYS

Plays are a logical progression from tableaus, for they develop the basic elements of drama, replacing pantomime and narrative with action and dialogue. They may include authentic one-act plays, adaptations of plays or stories, or scripts written by the students. The appropriate selection of material is of the utmost importance. The higher the foreign language level, the more consideration should be given to selecting meaningful material to correlate with the current studies.

Grimm's fairy tale, "Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten," has a particular appeal to younger learners with its depiction of the enterprising donkey, rooster, cat, and dog, whose singing earns them meals and frightens away thieves. A simple dramatization of this familiar tale is available for a FLES program in German.[7] Very short comedies and satires are best suited to junior high school. A delightful French one-act play which is easy to teach for level I is Cadet Rousselle.[8] Longer dramas and satires are more appreciated in the advanced levels. Seniors especially enjoy those which have philosophical substance, such as Sartre's Huis clos or Beckett's En attendant Godot. In the high school, students at the upper level are able to adapt long and difficult plays, presenting their own simplified version. The challenge of adapting an author's work for classroom presentation can be a learning experience in itself.

Short stories are also ideal for acting out in the classroom. A classic short story which has already been adapted for French classes is Maupassant's La Parure.[9] The story has been dramatized for student roles and arranged with a twentieth-century setting in a modern apartment in Paris.

In level I German, the famous episode in which Wilhelm Tell shoots an apple from his son's head is always attractive to young students. An excellent short passage, largely in dialogue, is available and is easily adaptable as a class presentation for six students to portray Tell, his wife and son, the prince, a soldier, and one narrator. At the end of the scene, when Tell successfully performs the feat, the entire class may join in acclaiming him: "Tell ist der beste Jäger im Land! Tell ist der Meister!" (Tell is the best marksman in the country! Tell is the master!)[10] For level III German, a humorous three-act playlet, "Lernen Sie Kochen, Gnädige Frau!" is recommended.[11]

Spanish students at the more advanced levels will enjoy performing Las tertulias de Madrid or other satirical sketches by the eighteenth-century poet, Ramón de la Cruz.

A particularly valuable publication for level III and IV French, German, or Spanish is the ACTFL workshop proceedings on teaching culture.[12] This collection of mini-drama scripts centers on cultural phenomena and social patterns abroad, such as a visit to a "restaurant universitaire" in Paris, but also includes suggestions for appropriate kinesics,[13] follow-up activities, and points for discussion.

DRAMATIZING POETRY AND SONG

Through its combination of charming words and rhythm, poetry is unexcelled for emotional and aesthetic impact. Either alone or in combination with musical instruments (for songs and ballads), poetry can be utilized in language teaching at any level.[14] Some poems will be most effective as a dramatic reading with students assuming the various speaking parts while others will lend themselves to an acted interpretation. Before adapting the poem for presentation, the instructor should review new vocabulary in the text and explain archaisms or other lexical problems. It is helpful, if possible, to play a commercial recording of the poem by a native reader.

The delightful fables of the seventeenth-century French poet and moralist, Jean de la Fontaine, are especially recommended for class pre-

sentation since they are concise, contain witty dialogue, and portray universal situations by means of amusing animal characters. A good example, suitable for level II or III, is "Le Corbeau et le renard." If the poem is to be acted out, the student taking the part of the fox should memorize his lines. In this poem the elements of acting, narration, and pantomime are all present. The fox will act and recite his lines while the crow mimes and the narrator reads.

Goethe's ballad "Erlkönig" is ideal as a dramatic reading for four level II or III German students.[15] In order to encourage expressivity in the reading of this poem, with its rising undercurrent of urgency, the parts assigned to the father, son, and elf king should be memorized. As is true in this case, musical settings exist for many of the German poems. The instructor may wish to play a recording of Schubert's very effective lied (art song), "Erlkönig," which will convey to the class, perhaps more impressively than a spoken version, the emotional experience of the text.

Poems can often be accompanied by chord instruments in the classroom. An excellent illustration is the beautiful Spanish poem, "La Guitarra,"[16] with its deep feeling about life and death. One student may recite this poem while another improvises on the guitar. A renaissance short song, "Paseabase el rey,"[17] is appropriate for a level II Spanish class. A chord instrument might also accompany this song, with its evocation of Granada and fifteenth-century Spain.

In general, songs can be counted on to enliven a class and enlist full participation of students.[18] Assorted collections of traditional French, German, and Spanish songs are available for the classroom.[19] Many of these songs, as well as some modern popular songs, permit active expression in dramatic form. For example, the whimsical popular song, "Deux escargots s'en vont à l'enterrement," set to a clever verse by Jacques Prévert, may be narrated or sung by the performers with hand puppets or silhouette cut-outs for a shadow play. The cut-outs may appear in a series of tableaus to represent the mournful snails with crepe on their horns who, having set out in the fall for the funeral of the dead leaf, arrive too late and find that it is spring:

> Les feuilles qui étaient mortes
> Sont toutes réssuscitées,
> Et les deux escargots
> Sont très désappointés.[20]

A second "act" might show the snails happily returning home under a summer moon, having drunk a glass of beer and cast aside their funeral attire. Once again, the equipment for the shadow play need not be sophis-

ticated to be operative in the classroom. A sheet of white wrapping paper stapled to a 16 by 20 inch picture frame and a tensor lamp can be quickly and inexpensively assembled for the shadow screen. In all drama labs the premise for the presentation and any relevant equipment should only be a stimulus for the students' own ingenuity.

FAIRY TALES AND FOLKLORE

The world of folk literature is an especially rich source for class dramatization. Simple adaptations of foreign fairy tales for which traditional English counterparts exist, such as "Rotkäppchen" or "La Belle au bois dormant," may be performed in the early stages of language instruction. Most children are already familiar with the tales, and the well defined characters are easy to "act out." At more advanced levels, the teacher may wish to compare the foreign version and the English version as a reflection of differing cultural influences.[21]

Another drama-related activity for young students is the flannelgram. For a FLES class in German, the familiar folktale, "Der Rattenfänger von Hameln,"[22] can be adapted for this technique. The teacher should prepare a large, flannel-covered board with the nap facing out so that cut-outs backed with a strip of flannel will adhere to it. The students will then design and cut out the figures of the Pied Piper, the children and citizens of Hamlin, and the rats to display on the flannel board while recounting the story. This flannelgram may be performed in several scenes representing the rat plague, the appearance of the Pied Piper before the Mayor of Hamlin, and the exodus of the rats and finally the children. For a Spanish class, "Blancanieves y los siete enanitos"[23] is an excellent subject for a flannelgram performance.

Of course, any of the techniques already discussed could be employed for fairy tales as well. The teacher will find that techniques and content are interchangeable, and many combinations of the techniques are also possible.

Like fairy tales, legends and myths provide excellent material for a drama lab. Such folklore also offers an opportunity to contrast separate cultures which share a common language, such as French Canadian and French Equatorial African. In The French Review, Rachel F. Deutch presented some beautiful examples from modern black writers of French, including "La Légende baoulé,"[24] which I taught in my intermediate level French classes. I explained in French that the heroine, Pokou, could have been an African queen and that the large river mentioned in the legend

could have been the Congo River. When it was suggested to the students that the legend could be dramatized, there were many volunteers who stayed after school to prepare it.

In the next lesson, one student retold the legend in French while several other students enacted the tragic scene. As the story unfolded, one girl carried a doll on her back, representing Pokou and her child. With heads down, other students, who represented her people, marched slowly along the board, which symbolized the river. The rest of the class chanted a drumbeat as a soft background. Then, at the most dramatic moment, as the narrator said the word "baouli" (The child is dead), the girl threw the doll to the floor, recreating the dramatic episode in the legend when the queen mother sacrifices her own child in the river to appease the gods and save her people. This presentation took twelve minutes of actual teaching time and was very effective drama. Incidentally, several of the students were inspired by this classroom experience to read more, independently, about the Congo, both Belgian and French.

TEAM PROJECTS

Maximum student participation combines with student creativity and situational dialogue to make the team project a profitable effort with which to climax the year's drama lab activities. It is in the high school that team projects are recommended, especially for intermediate language levels. Here is how the team project works.

The class is divided into groups of no more than four or five students of varying language abili'y. Each team is assigned a topic to research, adapt for presentation, and present before the rest of the class. One appropriate topic would be a foreign province—its population, history, folklore, food, clothing, crafts and industries, tourist attractions, sports, and famous citizens. One student gathers material in writing, making all notes in the foreign language. He passes all his notes to a second student, who uses them to compose a script in the foreign language for two or more other students. The script can be broken down into several aspects, which might treat geography, everyday life, activities, and people, all in a dramatic context. If the second student does not have adequate documentation for the script he is writing, he again turns to the first student for more specific information. Much of the time the two will work together at the library. When the script is completed, it is checked by the teacher before being passed to the others to be memorized and presented in front of the class. This presentation can also make use of maps and other audio-visual aids.

Another topic for this activity might be the recreation of an important historical event such as the French Revolution. Although this idea may seem epic at first, different aspects of the event may be presented after adequate research by means of student-composed scripts. Through dramatic monologues, characterizations of the major figures, such as Robespierre, Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, and André Chénier, can offer various perspectives on the historical situation.

If the project is a long one, two students can be assigned to do the research. It is wise to appoint a monitor on each team, who functions as a liaison with the teacher and who must be sure that each student does his share of the work. This has the added benefit of giving the impression that the students themselves have organized and run the entire team project. All students on a team should receive the same collective grade.

EVALUATION OF THE DRAMA LAB

We have examined some of the theoretical assumptions on which the drama lab is based, and we have reviewed a few of its practical applications. What are its benefits?

If nothing else, the drama lab provides an exposure to a foreign literature and culture—and does so in an interesting way.

At its best, this method functions not only as a source of information, but also as a means to greater student interest and involvement. Obviously, there is more to teaching than subject matter alone. I feel strongly that it is the duty of the foreign language teacher to provide a setting which will evoke both aesthetic and social values while the foreign language is being spoken. Moreover, an appreciation of foreign culture and literature tends to create in the student the desire to express himself correctly and even beautifully in that language. Though it is not always the case, assuming a character in a foreign language, whether it be a leading role in Sartre's Les Mouches or simply the dramatic recitation of a proverb or poem, can often help eliminate self-consciousness in speech and lead to a fluidity and freedom of expression which pure repetition drills could never accomplish in themselves.

Not only does this method involve the student more deeply in his subject, it also leads to student interaction. Language—any language—is, after all, a vehicle of communication. For a group of young people learning a language, the projects undertaken in a drama lab create a situation where communication in that language is absolutely necessary. By giving students an opportunity to work together, exchange ideas, and share their experiences, the drama lab brings life into the foreign-language classroom.

NOTES

[1]Theodore Huebener, Audio-Visual Techniques in Teaching Foreign Languages, rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 23.

[2]Howard Lee Nostrand, "Describing and Teaching the Sociocultural Context of a Foreign Language and Literature," Trends in Language Teaching, ed. Albert Valdman (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 21.

[3]Huebener.

[4]Theodore Huebener and Maxim Newmark, A First Course in German, 2nd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1964), pp. 389-90.

[5]Kathryn L. O'Brien and Marie Stella LaFrance, New Second Year French (Boston: Heath, 1963), pp. 66-74. A more elaborate presentation of this poem is offered to French III students in Alice Langellier and Sylvia N. Levy, Ce Monde des français (New York: Holt, 1970), pp. 52-57.

[6]Robert Lado, Margaret Adey, Joseph Michel, and Hilario S. Peña, Tesoro hispanico (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

[7]Gertrude Gunther and Harold Lenz, Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten: ein Schauspiel für FLES-Klassen (Middlebury, Vt.: Lenz, 1957).

[8]Louis Couture, Le Français vivant, I (Columbus, Ohio: C.E. Merrill, 1965), pp. 231-35.

[9]Katherine T. Brearley, Marguerite A. Primeau, and Ronald R. Jeffels, Contes et scénarios (New York: Holt, 1960), pp. 102-47.

[10]Theodore Huebener and Maxim Newmark, A First Course in German, 2nd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1964), pp. 237-39.

[11]Viola Herms Drath, Typisch deutsch? (New York: Simon, 1963).

[12]The Working Papers of the 1972 Pre-Conference Workshop on Teaching Culture (New York: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1973).

[13]For a report on the relationship of nonverbal communication to language teaching, see Jerald R. Green, Kinesics in the Foreign Language Classroom: MLA/ERIC Focus Report 24 (New York: MLA/ERIC, 1971).

[14]For a more detailed discussion of the preparation and presentation of poetry in language instruction, see G. Bording Mathieu, Poems in Early Foreign Language Instruction: MLA/ERIC Focus Report 15 (New York: MLA/ERIC, 1970); also Helen Carney, "Students Make the Scene," Modern Language Journal, 57 (Nov 1973), 335-40.

[15]Ernest J. Leo, ed., German Ballads (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 29-30.

[16]Laurel H. Turk and Edith M. Allen, El Español al día II, 3rd rev. ed. (Boston: Heath, 1968), p. 354.

[17]Archibald T. Davison and Willi Apel, Historical Anthology of Music (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 132, 230, 251.

[18]For further information on the use of songs, see Olivia Muñoz, Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom: MLA/ERIC Focus Report 12 (New York: MLA/ERIC, 1969).

[19]For availability of song books as well as discs and tapes, see Mary J. Ollman, ed., MLA Selective List of Materials for Use by Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools (New York: MLA, 1962), pp. 11, 15, et passim.

[20]Andrée Bergens and David Noakes, eds. Prévert vous parle . . . (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 54-57.

[21]For specific points of comparison between "Rotkäppchen" and "Red Riding Hood," see Gerhard H. Weiss, Folktale and Folklore—Useful Cultural Tools for Teachers of German: MLA/ERIC Focus Report 6 (New York: MLA/ERIC, 1969).

[22]Huebener and Newmark, A First Course in German, pp. 281-83.

[23]José María Carbonell Barberá, ed., Blancanieves y los siete enanitos (Barcelona: Francisco Bruguera, 1972).

[24]Rachel F. Deutch, "Suggestions for the Teaching of Negro Literature of French Expression," The French Review, 42 (April 1969), 706-17.

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